

"The People Process" in Tempe



This article is part 1 of a 3 part series from the city of Tempe, AZ

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Intro:

Shortly after accepting the position of Tempe City Manager, Charlie Meyer initiated a citywide organizational improvement program called LDP (Leadership Development Program). This initiative is comprised of three tightly integrated core processes involving people, strategy and operations.

In the April article: "How the City of Tempe is Aligning Top Priorities through People, Strategy and Operations," Tempe summarizes its pursuit of and progress in achieving the "wildly important" through the LDP initiative. Tempe City Manager Charlie Meyer and Gretchen Maynard, Tempe Organizational Development Administrator, provide a more in depth explanation of this program in this three-part series.

Gretchen Maynard, Organizational Development Administrator:

Charlie and I began discussing leadership development during his first weeks as Tempe's city manager. That was in December 2007, which coincided with the beginning of the worst economic downturn in our organization's history. Economic realities made it clear that we had to quickly get out of our comfort zone of business as usual and implement a system that would re-energize and re-focus the workforce on getting the most important things done.

Limiting our vision to traditional leadership training is like running our fingers through water – it provides a ripple effect but no lasting impact. People need to hear, see and to continuously practice leadership behavior as part of their daily work. This integrated approach begins to manifest into productive, proactive accountability, collaborative problem-solving and entrepreneurial innovation. Employees who demonstrate this behavior are "knowledge workers."

That term knowledge worker was coined by Peter Drucker (1909 - 2005), one of the most influential thinkers and writers on the subject of management theory and practice. Drucker foresaw a socio-economic "age of knowledge" rising from our former economic age of agriculture where wealth was defined as ownership of land. It was eclipsed by our current "industrial-age" economy defined as wealth through industrial capital and manufacturing. Extensive technological advances are heralding this new socioeconomic "age of knowledge" where wealth is gained from innovation as workers engage in collaborative, creative, nonroutine problem-solving and continuous improvement.

Drucker portrayed knowledge workers as "executives" (regardless of position) because their contributions would materially affect the capacity of the organization to perform and get results. The world is rapidly

transitioning to this new economic age and so building knowledge-age leadership today sustains value in the future. We can start by valuing people as our most important resource through cultivating knowledge sharing, continuous improvement and freeing workers to perform in networks, rather than strict hierarchies and within limited, static job descriptions. To thrive, knowledge workers will gravitate to those "knowledge-based organizations" that measure, reward and promote people who know how to achieve the right results.

Charlie Meyer, City Manager:

Building a knowledge-age workforce of strategic, systems-oriented, innovative leaders at every level is the people part of the grand vision of LDP.

Why does it matter? That is the question driving this leadership development initiative for Tempe. With over 38 years in the City/County Management business, I have concluded that there are no quick fixes, panaceas or management initiative du jour that matters. Believe me, I have tried the flavor of the week approach and it doesn't work. If anything, that approach just drives cynicism deeper into an organization.

The approach that does matter is both simple and hard. It is getting the right people into the right roles, developing and sticking to a strategic focus and then, perhaps the hardest part of all, developing the discipline to execute. People, strategy, and operations. So while annoying little things like the Great Recession take up your time, the real job of the manager is to build the organization's knowledge base for the future.

We embark on the people part of this initiative with activities as simple as hiring the best talent we can and engaging in rigorous probationary processes like setting very clear expectations. It also means

engaging in proactive performance planning that includes setting measurable goals that are articulated in clear, simple, straightforward language so it's easy to determine when goals have been met. In order to ensure that employees are set up to succeed, it is crucial to provide learning and work place coaching on how to set meaningful goals and execute them.

Some of these core activities actually start to overlap into the "strategy" and "operations" parts of this initiative. It's a bit difficult to separate them because they are so integrated into the total framework we are working toward as a city organization. In the next two parts of this three-part series, we will delve further into the specifics of strategy and operations.

A fundamental characteristic of the LDP initiative is simplicity. We are adamant about it. As a matter of fact, as we continue to improve upon and develop new procedures to advance this initiative, we periodically find ourselves going back to the drawing board when we start getting too complicated.

This dedication to simplicity periodically generates push-back from the technically-minded who are inclined to dismiss simple as superficial, thus missing its elegance. The key is to ask their support in giving the system a chance to work.

This knowledge-age leadership approach is not rocket science. It's common sense. And great leaders understand the power in striving for simplicity so that others can easily understand. The "people process" is behavior-based leadership characterized by knowledge workers at every level who talk straight, demonstrate respect, create transparency, right wrongs, show loyalty and deliver results.

For more information about the city of Tempe, please visit **www.tempe.gov**.